

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A method for retrieving information using a server system coupled to a centralized database and at least one client system, said method comprising:

selecting an object from an electronic document displayed on a client system;

displaying a function menu on the client system to prompt a user to select a desired function to apply to the selected object, the selected function including a purchasing function associated with a vendor web site wherein the purchasing function initiates a purchase of an item using the vendor web site, the item associated with the selected object;

transmitting the selected object and the selected function from the client system to the server system;

processing the selected object by applying the selected function to the selected object at the server system to produce a processed object;

transmitting the processed object from the server system to a remote vendor web server, the remote vendor web server hosting the vendor web site;

receiving a result from the vendor web server at the server system, the result generated by the vendor web server based on the processed object and including at least a resulting web page;

determining whether further processing of the result is necessary to complete the selected function; and

transmitting at least one of the result and another output to the client system.

2. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 further comprising:

processing at the client system the at least one of the resulting web page and other output; and

prompting the user to select a command to perform on the resulting web page.

3. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein selecting an object from an electronic document further comprises selecting an object including at least one of text, a hyperlink, a picture, a sound file, a video file, and any selectable object included within the electronic document.

4. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein selecting an object from an electronic document further comprises:

processing the selected object using optical character recognition (OCR);

extracting text from the selected object using OCR; and

transmitting at least a portion of the extracted text from the client system to the server system such that the server system processes the extracted text.

5. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein selecting an object from an electronic document further comprises utilizing a text-grabbing algorithm to select the object.

6. (currently amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein displaying a function menu on the client system further comprises enabling the user to designate a first web site as a target web site for a first function included within the function menu, and associate a first command with the first function executable using the first web site, the first command including a computer instruction other than a search instruction.

7. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein displaying a function menu on the client system further comprises enabling the user to customize the function menu by selecting each function included within the function menu.

8. (original) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein displaying a function menu on the client system further comprises displaying a function menu on the client system

by utilizing at least one of a mouse, a keyboard, a track-ball, a joystick, a digitizing pad, a touch screen, a voice activation device, and any input device connected to the client system.

9. (previously presented) A method in accordance with Claim 1 wherein processing the selected object by applying the selected function at the server system further comprises:

generating a plurality of universal resource locators (URLs) based on the selected object and the selected function;

communicating with a vendor web server corresponding to each of the plurality of URLs;

generating a processing result at each of the vendor web servers by processing the selected object;

transmitting the results from each of the vendor web servers to the server system; and

processing each of the results at the server system before transmitting at least one resulting web page and other output to the client system.

10. (currently amended) A network based system for retrieving information, said system comprising:

a client system comprising a user interface and a browser;

a centralized database for storing information; and

a server system configured to be coupled to said client system and said database, said server system further configured to:

enable a user to select an object from an electronic document displayed on said user interface;

display a function menu on said user interface to prompt a user to select a desired function to apply to the selected object, the selected function including a purchasing function

associated with a vendor web site wherein the purchasing function initiates a purchase of an item using the vendor web site, the item associated with the selected object;

receive the selected object and the selected function from said client system;

process the selected object by applying the selected function to the selected object to produce a processed object;

transmit the processed object from said server system to a vendor web server in connection therewith, the vendor web server hosting the vendor web site;

receive a result from the vendor web server at said server system, the result generated by the vendor web server based on the processed object and including at least a resulting web page;

determine whether further processing of the result is necessary to complete the selected function; and

transmit at least one of the result and another output to said client system.

11. (original) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said client system configured to:

process the at least one of the resulting web page and other output; and

prompt the user to select a command to perform on the resulting web page.

12. (original) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said client system configured to apply a text-grabbing algorithm to select the object.

13. (original) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said client system configured to display a function menu on said user interface in response to a command from at least one of a mouse, a keyboard, a track-ball, a joystick, a digitizing pad, a touch screen, a voice activation device, and any input device connected to said client system.

14. (original) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said client system further comprises at least one of a cell phone, a computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), and a television.

15. (original) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said server system further configured to:

process the selected object using optical character recognition (OCR);

extract text from the selected object using OCR; and

process at least a portion of the extracted text by applying the selected function.

16. (currently amended) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said server system further configured to enable the user to designate a first web site as a target web site for a first function included within the function menu, and associate a first command with the first function executable using the first web site, the first command including a computer instruction other than a search instruction.

17. (original) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said server system further configured to enable the user to customize the function menu by selecting each function included within the function menu.

18. (currently amended) A system in accordance with Claim 10 wherein said server system further configured to:

generate a plurality of universal resource locators (URLs) based on the selected object and the selected function;

communicate with a vendor web server corresponding to each of the plurality of URLs;

receive a processing result from each of said vendor web servers;

process each of the results; and

transmit at least one resulting web page and other output to said client system based on the results.

19 (currently amended) A computer program embodied on a computer readable medium for retrieving information using a server system coupled to a client system, a database, and a remote vendor web server, the client system including a user interface, said program comprising a code segment that prompts a user to select an object from an electronic document displayed on the user interface and then:

displays a function menu on the user interface to prompt the user to select a desired function to apply to the selected object, the selected function including a purchasing function associated with a vendor web site wherein the purchasing function initiates a purchase of an item using the vendor web site, the item associated with the selected object;

transmits the selected object and the selected function from the client system to the server system;

processes the selected object by applying the selected function to the selected object at the server system to produce a processed object;

transmits the processed object from the server system to the vendor web server, the vendor web server hosting the vendor web site;

receives a result from the vendor web server at the server system, the result generated by the vendor web server based on the processed object and including at least a resulting web page;

determines whether further processing of the result is necessary to complete the selected function; and

transmits at least one of the result and another output to the client system.

20. (original) A computer program in accordance with Claim 19 further comprising a code segment that:

processes at the client system the at least one of the resulting web page and other output; and

prompts the user to select a command to perform on the resulting web page.

21. (original) A computer program in accordance with Claim 19 further comprising a code segment that:

processes at the client system the selected object using optical character recognition (OCR);

extracts text from the selected object using OCR; and

transmits at least a portion of the extracted text from the client system to the server system for further processing.

22. (original) A computer program in accordance with Claim 19 further comprising a code segment that utilizing a text-grabbing algorithm to select the object.

23. (currently amended) A computer program in accordance with Claim 19 further comprising a code segment that enables the user to designate a first web site as a target web site for a first function included within the function menu, and associate a first command with the first function executable using the first web site, the first command including a computer instruction other than a search instruction.

24. (original) A computer program in accordance with Claim 19 further comprising a code segment that enables the user to customize the function menu by selecting each function included within the function menu.

25. (previously presented) A computer program in accordance with Claim 19 further comprising a code segment that:

generates a plurality of universal resource locators (URLs) based on the selected object and the selected function;

communicates with a vendor web server corresponding to each of the plurality of URLs;

receives a processing result from each of the vendor web servers;

processes each of the results at the server system; and

transmits at least one resulting web page and other output to the client system.